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ADAPTATIONS OF SHAKSPERE FOR PERFORMANCE IN HIGH SCHOOLS

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When Shakspeare's plays are considered as possibilities for production by high-school students, so many difficulties of scenic arrangement and costume suggest themselves that they are usually passed over as involving too much trouble and expense. They need not be difficult or expensive. The Elizabethan stage was radically different from ours, but by an adaptation of Shakespere's plays along the lines demanded by such physical differences, some of them can be produced with ease and effectiveness. Several of the comedies can be shortened and arranged for one or two scenes; and, so adapted, they become far more acceptable than many of the plays advertised as "suitable for high schools." Here is an account of what a class of tenth- and eleventh-grade pupils did with *Twelfth Night*, demonstrating that it was as actable and entertaining as a modern comedy.

The reading editions of *Twelfth Night* divide the play into five acts and nineteen scenes, which require at least eight different settings, involving twenty-four changes of scenery. It will be recalled that the setting of the first scene is a seacoast, and that the action then shifts in rapid succession to the Duke's, to Olivia's, to a garden, a chamber, a doorway, and wherenot. These difficulties we eliminated by a very simple device which made it unnecessary to shift the scene at all.

This was done by effecting a scenic arrangement to represent neutral ground, in the form of an Italian garden, or court, which was set a little back from the street that ran across the stage in front. At either side, near the front of the stage, high brick walls projected at right angles from the wings some five or six feet. These served to separate the street from the court, and gave the latter an air of seclusion. To the right of this court was the

entrance to the gardens of the Duke's palace; and Olivia's private garden lay off the stage to the left. Persons coming along the street made entrances from either side in front of the wall, while the entrances from the palaces were made behind the walls. For this scene the setting may be made as elaborate as circumstances allow, or as simple as they demand. Red-brown paper tacked on frames and lined with chalk will look quite like brick walls; palms and box-trees, a piece of statuary, and a garden urn will create the atmosphere of an Italian garden. The back may be shut off by bushes placed against a curtain of cloth or paper, brown below and blue above. It is surprising what good effects can be gained by such simple devices.

The whole action of the play is made to take place on the neutral ground between the two gardens. A little thought and planning will make clear how the plot can be unfolded in this one scene. With the rise of the curtain, Viola and the sea captain enter along the street, and we learn of the shipwreck, the Duke's unrequited love, and Viola's sudden plan to enter Orsino's service. As they pass on, the Duke enters from his gardens to meet Valentine, who is returning from the embassy to Olivia. As the pair turn to the palace of Orsino, Sir Toby and Maria enter from Olivia's garden, to be joined soon by Sir Andrew, who comes from the street. As the trio depart, the Duke and Viola enter. After the Duke has left Viola, she meets Olivia and Maria, who enter from the opposite side.

Enough has been said to show how the scheme works out. By omitting some lines, by shifting others, and by changing a word here and there, the articulation may be kept complete. Just as much or just as little of the dialogue may be given as is desired. The whole plot and most of the comedy scenes may be presented in an adaptation running not more than forty-five minutes, while the division into acts and the shifting of scenes would consume an entire evening.

As You Like It and *Much Ado About Nothing* can easily be arranged for two settings, and other plays of Shakspeare will lend themselves to the same treatment. If a defense is needed for so free a handling of the material, we can urge that Shakspeare did the

same thing himself with the best material that came to his hands, adapting it to the conditions that existed. In the one-act version that we presented, we lost nothing of the poetry and the splendid rhythm of the blank verse. At some points Shakspeare's dramatic structure could not by any possibility suffer injury. And we made Shakspeare a reality. Pupils enjoyed him as never before, and those who had the privilege of taking the parts are eager for a better acquaintance with the highest class of drama.

That dramatics have a proper and permanent place in our schools seems generally admitted now, and we may hope for decided improvement in the class of plays given by pupils. The Drama League, to be ultimately successful, may well lend its support to a campaign of education in the public schools, where the theater-goers of the next generation are now forming their tastes. Slap-stick comedy and farce, as found in hundreds of plays given by high schools and colleges, cannot create an appreciation of good drama. Enough plays of high grade are available to supply the demand, and teachers should insist upon good ones or none.